The Philippine Department of Tourism
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on the DOT

P 4

DOT inaugurates Tourist Rest Area in Bukidnon; Frasco bares plan to build 15 more TRAs across the country

P 8

PHL records Php 286B tourism receipts from January to July; Frasco bares efforts to support tourism in Central Visayas

P 17

DOT in full support of FIBA World Cup

P 20

Love the Philippines free rides for DOT employees

DOT records more inbound flights to PHL, increase in domestic air routes

(Story on page 2)

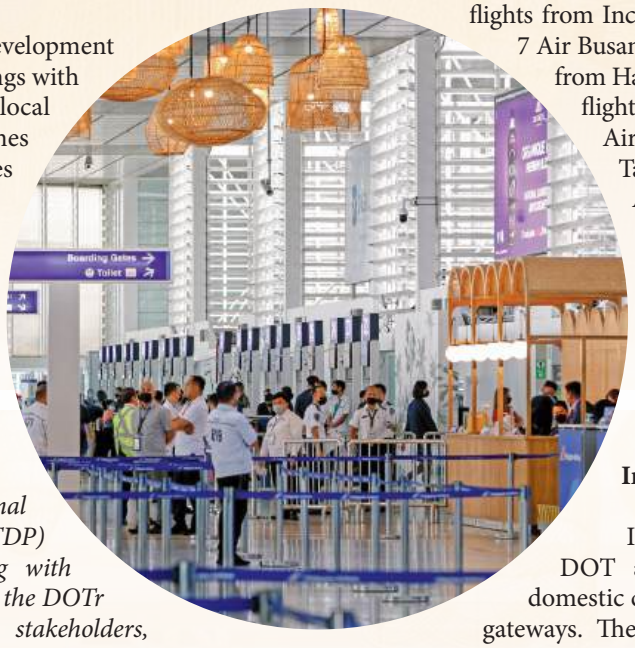
DOT records more inbound flights to PHL, increase in domestic air routes

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco bared favorable developments on air connectivity benefiting Philippine Tourism in line with the Marcos administration's convergence efforts towards the development of the country's tourism industry.

It can be recalled that in Secretary Frasco's listening tours with tourism stakeholders since last year to get to know the most urgent needs and concerns of the industry, connectivity and enhanced gateway access were among the urgent and recurring concerns raised by stakeholders.

Since then, the DOT entered into a convergence with the Department of Transportation (DOTr), and collaborated with the Civil Aeronautics Board (CAB), the Civil Aviation Authority of the Philippines (CAAP), and other aviation stakeholders in determining measures that will promote seamless travel experience, including the improvement of gateways, enhancement of infrastructure, and maximization of the country's aviation hubs, among others.

The DOT also led route development initiatives, primary to this are meetings with top executives of international and local air carriers to promote the Philippines as a destination for these airlines and forge partnerships as far as the further development of the country's tourism industry is concerned. Moreover, the DOT also promotes the country's tourism destinations and gateways in key international aviation networking, and business-to-business (B2B) activities including the Routes Asia and Routes World, among others.



"In keeping with our National Tourism Development Plan (NTDP) 2023-2028, we have been working with relevant government agencies such as the DOTr and CAAP, and aviation industry stakeholders, recognizing the urgent need to increase the number of flights into the country and increase overall accessibility for both our foreign and domestic guests, to convey that the Philippine government under President Ferdinand 'Bongbong' Marcos, Jr. is exhausting all means to open up the country to business and tourism," Secretary Frasco said.

"We express our sincerest gratitude to DOTr Secretary Bautista, and the CAAP led by Captain Manuel Tamayo, and all our partners in the aviation industry including our airlines, who have responded to the needs of our tourists and traveling public through the resumption of flights that were halted due to the pandemic, as well as the institution new flights to reinvigorate the country's tourism industry," she added.

Additional International Air Seats

Based on the DOT's Routes Development report for June 2023, eight of the country's international gateways saw a significant growth in terms of incoming frequencies and seats per week.

For instance, on a weekly average, compared to June 2022, Clark in June 2023 saw an increase of 180% in terms of incoming scheduled frequencies and 215% in terms of incoming seats, while Manila saw an increase of 75% in terms of incoming frequencies and 120% in terms of incoming seats.

In Visayas, Kalibo recorded a 640% increase in incoming frequencies and 409% increase in incoming seats, Cebu with an increase of 300% in terms of incoming frequencies and 297% in terms of incoming seats, and Bohol with an increase of 200% in terms of incoming frequencies and 128% in terms of incoming seats.

Davao saw a 50% increase in incoming frequencies, and 38% increase in incoming seats. Meanwhile, Caticlan and Cagayan North recorded six frequencies from Taipei, and two frequencies from Macau, respectively.

Between June and July 2023, the country welcomed 58 new incoming weekly frequencies from various origin cities into the country's international gateways.

The DOT reports the following incoming weekly frequencies in June and July : Manila (7 Zip Air from Tokyo, and 2 Air China flights from Chengdu); Cebu (7 China Eastern Airlines flights from Shanghai, 4 Philippine Air Asia flights from Tokyo, 2 Cebu Pacific from Taipei, and an increase from 5 to 7 Asiana Airlines flights from Incheon); Bohol (2 Asiana Airlines and 7 Air Busan flights from Seoul), Kalibo (3 flights from Hangzhou, 3 flights from Ningbo, and 3 flights from Wenzhou via Loong Air, 4 Ok Airways from Chengdu, and 2 TigerAir Taiwan from Taipei), Clark (7 Asiana Airlines flights from Seoul), Caticlan (3 Royal Airways flights from Hong Kong), and Cagayan North (2 Royal Airway flights from Macau). In addition to commercial flights, the DOT also welcomed various charter flights that support the country's destinations.

Increase in Domestic Air Seats

In terms of domestic tourism, the DOT also noted a significant jump in domestic connectivity in the country's tourism gateways. The industry gained from at least 17 city pairs, with about 83 incoming weekly frequencies that were launched between July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2023. This includes new domestic air routes that were instituted during this period, including flights between Cebu-Baguio (4 frequencies per week), Cebu-Borongan (2 frequencies per week), and Cebu-Naga (4 frequencies per week).

Among the domestic flights that resumed in the same period include: Clark to Bacolod, Busuanga, Cagayan de Oro, Caticlan, Davao, Iloilo, General Santos, and Puerto Princesa and vice versa; Manila to Tablas, and Lal-o (v.v.); Davao to Bacolod, Cagayan de Oro, and Siargao, and vice versa; and Zamboanga to Cotabato (v.v.).

"With the DOT's Philippine Experience Program and regional travel expos, we are optimistic that our stakeholders, particularly from the aviation industry will see the need to improve connectivity around the country to cater to the growing demands of our travelers," added the tourism chief.

US-based United Airlines announces direct flights between San Francisco and Manila

Meanwhile, the DOT also expresses its elation following United Airlines' mounting of nonstop flights connecting Manila with San Francisco starting October as part of its expansion in Asia. At present, United flies to Manila from Guam and Palau. Once the flights between Manila and San Francisco become operational, the airline will be the first American carrier to fly direct to Manila from continental US in a long while. ***DOT***

DOT inaugurates Tourist Rest Area in IGaCoS Davao del Norte

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the inauguration of the Tourist Rest Area (TRA) in the Island Garden City of Samal (IGaCoS), Davao del Norte on August 18.

The TRA in IGaCoS is the third facility to be completed and turned over by the DOT to the local government units, subsequent to the TRAs in Medellin, Cebu, and Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon, which were inaugurated in 10 July and 04 August, respectively.

As may be recalled, the DOT, led by Secretary Frasco, broke ground on TRAs in strategic locations nationwide, in a bid to provide comfort and convenience to travelers when accessing the country's tourism destinations as part of the Department's contribution to President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr.'s directive to enhance the overall tourist experience.

Present in the ribbon cutting and ceremonial handing over of the TRA with Secretary Frasco were IGaCoS Mayor Al David Uy, MARINO Partylist Representative Sandro Gonzalez, Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) Board of Director and Mindanao Development Authority (MinDA) Chairperson Sec. Maria Belen Sunga-Acosta, DOT Undersecretary Shahlimar Hofer Tamano, DOT-11 Regional Director Tanya Rabat-Tan, and TIEZA Assistant Chief Operating Officer (ACOO) Gregory Oller.

Consistent with the TRAs earlier completed by the DOT and its infrastructure arm, the TIEZA, this tourist facility in IGaCoS is equipped with free-to-use and traveler-friendly amenities such as clean restrooms, charging station, lounge area, and a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers.

The TRA also features a tourist information area and a pasalubong (souvenir) center for buying local crafts and products, making it a one-stop-shop for travelers who will be exploring the enchanting island destination.

Tourists can also conveniently access the DOT TRA in Carcar and Medellin towns in Cebu, and Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon.

Other TRAs that will soon be completed and inaugurated include Baguio City; Dauis town in Bohol; Pagudpud in Ilocos Norte; the municipalities of Carmen, and Moalboal in Cebu; as well as Roxas in Palawan.

In addition to the DOT's initial roster of ten TRAs, Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco announced the Department's intention to establish 15 more TRAs across the country in the coming months.

On the sidelines of the inauguration TRA in IGaCoS, Secretary Frasco led the awarding of the P300,000 worth of frontline service and language course and kits to the Adecor United Fisherfolk Organization (AdUFOr), to further assist them in their management of the site of the Taklobo Tours, one of the major tourism attractions on the island.

Further, at the same event, the DOT officially turned over the Ecotourism Management and Business Plan (EMBP) 2023-2025 to the AdUFOr.

The Davao Regional Ecotourism Committee, chaired by the DOT Region 11 Office and supported by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), came up with the EMBP for key community-based ecotourism enterprises (CBEE) in the region, such as the AdUFOr who manage the Taklobo Tours in the ICaGoS.

According to Secretary Frasco, the turnover of the said plan will play a vital role in the promotion of biodiversity conservation, enhancement of eco-tourism, building capacity within local communities, and providing sustainable livelihood opportunities.

The EMBP shall also serve as a guide on the enhancement of the current ecotourism business in the area through a ready tour package which shall be used for the marketing of said attraction under the Regional Tourism Circuit.

Love Begets Love!

Some 48 IGaCos tour guides who are accredited by the DOT, received curated tour guiding kits from Secretary Frasco.

Inside the kits are essentials that the guides can use in their day-to-day duties, including sunglasses, a tour guide hat, sunblock, tour guide journal, and a lapel microphone.

"It is through the love of our tour guides for our tourists, that our tourists are engendered to keep coming back to your destinations and, therefore, it is only right that we show you that same degree of love," Secretary Frasco said.

The Secretary has been gifting tour guides across the various tourism destinations in the country including Intramuros, Iloilo, Zamboanga, Davao, and Manolo Fortich in Bukidnon, with essential tour guide kits to reciprocate the love that they have been showing visitors of the Philippines. ***DOT***

DOT inaugurates Tourist Rest Area in Bukidnon; Frasco bares plan to build 15 more TRAs across the country

Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon - In a move to further spur tourism development in Mindanao, the Department of Tourism (DOT), led by Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco, has formally inaugurated the Tourist Rest Area (TRA) at the scenic Manolo Fortich town in Bukidnon province.

This is the second TRA that was formally handed over to a local government unit (LGU) by the DOT, next to Medellin, Cebu in July.

The newly inaugurated facility features an information center, lounge and charging stations, a coffee shop, clean restrooms with showers, a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers, and a pasalubong center to showcase local products from Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) such as the famous Bukidnon coffee, beaded items from T'boli tribes, and more. It also showcases artworks made by Bukidnon's local painters and leaf carvers which add vibrance to the overall look of the tourist facility.

The tourism chief was joined by Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) Chief Operating Officer (COO) Mark Lapid, Bukidnon Governor Rogelio Neil Roque, Vice Governor Clive Quiño, Mayor Rogelio Quiño, Vice Mayor Reynaldo Bagayas, Jr., 4th District Representative Laarni Lavin Roque, DOT Undersecretaries Shahlimar Hofer Tamano and Ferdinand Jumapao, and Regional Director Marie Elaine Unchuan during the ribbon cutting ceremony.

A symbolic key was also turned over to the LGU during the inauguration ceremony. A leaf art showing a "key" created by local town artist Wilmar Sumahoy was also ceremoniously hung at the TRA site after the ribbon-cutting event as a manifestation of the DOT's unwavering commitment to the enhancement of the overall tourist experience in the country.

In an address, Secretary Frasco shared that the establishment of the TRA is pursuant to the directive of President Ferdinand R. Marcos. Jr. to improve the country's tourism infrastructure as well as to enhance the overall tourist experience in the country.

"It fills me with great joy to be back in the beautiful province of Bukidnon to fulfill the promise of our President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr. to give tourism development priority under his administration, to invest in infrastructure, connectivity, innovation, digitalization, and most of all to equalize tourism opportunities," the tourism chief said.

"This Tourist Rest Area is one of the ten that are already under construction, some of which have been completed all over the country. We have a Tourist Rest Area in Ilocos Norte, we have one in Baguio City, we have several in Cebu, in Bohol, we also have in Palawan, in Samal Island, in Davao del Norte, and of course here in Manolo Fortich. The good news is this is only the first of ten as we are breaking ground on fifteen more tourist rest areas all over the Philippines in the hopes of spreading countrywide development and progress through tourism," the tourism chief announced.

For their part, the local government heads of Bukidnon province thanked the DOT for prioritizing Mindanao in its tourism projects which would further boost tourism in the province.

"Bukidnon's tourism potential has barely been scratched. Our province offers the top ten of the country's highest mountain peaks. Today, we wish to express our special thanks to Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and the Department of Tourism for giving us this tourist service center and rest area. This infrastructure project will be a great asset to the development of Bukidnon's tourism industry," Governor Roque said.

"Thank you to the Department of Tourism Secretary Christina Frasco and Regional Director Marie Elaine Unchuan for their confidence in choosing Manolo Fortich as one of the first towns across the country where tourists can rest well and be assisted while enjoying tours to and from so many beautiful places in Mindanao," Mayor Quiño said.

"Manolo Fortich will continue giving wonders and inspiration to tourists as [having] the only aerial, music, arts, and food festival in the country. As we support President Marcos' economic agenda to boost the tourism industry, we commit that this tourist rest area shall be well-maintained and one with the best-managed tourist rest areas in the Philippines," the mayor signified his commitment before the tourism chief.

The TRA in Bukidnon province was built in a strategic area that will particularly cater to the tourists traveling to and from the municipalities of the Manolo Fortich, Impasug-ong, Sumilao, and Libona.

Initially, 10 TRAs were broken ground last year, including eight other facilities that are currently under construction located in Samal Island in Davao del Norte; the towns of Carcar, Carmen, and Moalboal in Cebu; Dauis in Bohol; Pagudpud in Ilocos Norte; Roxas in Palawan; and Baguio City.

Fifteen more TRAs will be added to the roster this year.

"Tourism is for the benefit of Filipino families. Every time you buy a pasalubong, you book a hotel, you ride a tourism transport, you visit our local destinations, you are able to help a Filipino family that is in the tourism industry.That is why it is so important for us to come together to ensure that we continue tourism development as envisioned by our President. The commitment I can give you is that the Department of Tourism will be there, ready to assist you with what you need in order for the progress and development of the Province of Bukidnon to continue," enthused the tourism chief.

Assistance to community-based tourism organizations

On the sidelines of the inauguration, Secretary Frasco met with Bukidnon-based tourism frontline workers to extend tourism-related assistance.

The DOT Chief awarded Basic mountaineering training and livelihood kits amounting to P300,000 to the community-based tourism organization Kalasanen Mountaineering Club (KMC) for mountain activities for tourists.

"We are very thankful for the support of the Department of Tourism, headed by Sec. Christina Garcia Frasco. This support is a such a huge help in our livelihood and the future of our advocacy in protecting our mountain treasure and would help each and one of us. Thank you Sec. Garcia-Frasco, we are happy and thankful for the gift that you have given us. We are here to support you and the Department of Tourism for the future of the tourism industry here in Bukidnon, Northern Mindanao and the Philippines," said Junell Wayan, President of KMC.

Meanwhile, fifteen DOT-accredited tour guides also received tour-guiding essentials such as hats, electronic lapels, sunblock, bamboo tumblers, bamboo sunglasses, and tour guide journals.

"Thank you so much for your hard work and sacrifice. You are the prime movers of the tourism industry. May these tour guide kits help you continue to tell the Filipino story with love," Frasco tells the tour guides present.

Other guests present during the inauguration were 1st District Representative Jose Manuel Alba, Lanao del Norte town Mayor Marcos Mamay, members of the Sangguniang Bayan of the Municipality of Manolo Fortich, representatives of the municipalities of Malaybalay City, Pangantucan, Maramag, Don Carlos, and Quezon, and Philippine Army 52nd Brigade Philippine Army BGen. Francis S. Wong. ***DOT***

DOT inks deal with Cebu LGU for more Tourist Rest Areas, "Heritage City" Carcar thanks DOT for TRA

Carcar City, Cebu - The heritage city of the south gets a tourism boost after the turnover of the Department of Tourism (DOT) Tourist Rest Area (TRA) led by First Lady Liza Araneta Marcos, Vice President Sara Duterte, and Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco.

The turnover and inauguration ceremony was also attended by Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia, Deputy Speaker Duke Frasco, and Carcar City Mayor Patricio Barcenas, and Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA) COO Mark Lapid and graciously witnessed by Senators Manuel 'Lito' Lapid and Ramon 'Bong' Revilla, Jr. last August 27.

"As we ventured to fulfill our President's vision to transform the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse in Asia, we made the effort to listen. We listened to our tourism stakeholders, we listened to our tourists, and their concern was common, and that is that to and from the beautiful destinations across the country, they needed a place to rest, they needed amenities, and they needed clean and decent restrooms," Secretary Frasco enthused.

"Here in the heritage city of Carcar, through the tourist rest area, culture meets convenience. Through the tourist rest area, we can allow our tourists to immediately feel the love and warmth of the Filipino people, of the Cebuanos, through the amenities that we have to offer," the tourism chief added.

The TRA, situated in Carcar City, rich in Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-classical architecture, is the fourth completed facility and the second in Cebu Province that the DOT turned over to local government units (LGUs).

The DOT earlier inaugurated completed TRAs in Medellin, Cebu; Manolo Fortich, Bukidnon; and the Island Garden City of Samal (IGaCoS), Davao del Norte on July 10, August 4, and August 18, respectively.

In 2022, upon assumption to office, Secretary Frasco initiated the groundbreaking and development of 10 TRAs in strategic locations nationwide. This initiative aims to enhance the comfort and convenience of travelers accessing the country's tourism destinations, aligning with President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos Jr.'s vision to elevate the overall tourist experience.

Enhanced Convenience for tourists

This tourist facility, catering to tourists traveling to and from Carcar City and nearby areas, offers traveler-friendly amenities such as clean restrooms, a charging station, a lounge area, a shower area, and a lactation room for breastfeeding mothers—all of which can be used for free by tourists.

The TRA in the 5th-class component city creates a convenient one-stop shop for festival delegates and patrons as well as travelers exploring the city rich in Baroque, Rococo, and Neo-classical architecture.

"We are very happy na isa kami sa mga binigyan, we are very privileged and very much thankful for all the support that we received from the national government. Carcar City has been called a heritage zone in Cebu at marami din ang mga turistang pupunta dito to see new things, pati pictures during Spanish and American period, and because of Carcar's strategic location, it becomes a gateway to the South (of Cebu)," Carcar Mayor Barcenas said on the newly-inaugurated TRA in Brgy. Poblacion.

Completed by the DOT and TIEZA, the TRA also features a tourist information area and pasalubong (souvenir) center, offering local crafts and products, including banana chips, chocolate crunch, and Carcar's famous chicharon, to empower the SMEs in the area.

Forging partnerships for more TRAs

On the sidelines of the inauguration of the TRA in Carcar City, Cebu, DOT Secretary Frasco signed the MOA for the TRAs that will be established in Bogo City and the Municipalities of Pinamungajan, Dumanjug, and Santander.

These additional TRAs are part of the initiative led by Cebu Governor Garcia, who pledged to match the number of TRAs turned over by the DOT to the province. The DOT has inaugurated two TRAs in Medellin and now, in Carcar, with two more to be completed soon in Carmen and Moalboal.

Moreover, a separate MOA was also signed by COO Mark Lapid for the promotion and development of TIEZA's assets.

The agreement is between the DOT's infrastructure arm and the municipalities of Argao, Dalaguete, and Moalboal.

According to the agreement, Cebu will support TIEZA's property marketing efforts via the Provincial Economic Enterprise Council (EEC). These high-value assets are anticipated to improve Cebu's tourism portfolio and package deals while also generating income and employment for the province and concerned LGUs.

Meanwhile, the establishment of sisterhood relations between Cebu and Albay provinces was also formalized through the MOA between Governor Garcia and Albay Governor Edcel 'Grex' Lagman.

"We, in the Department of Tourism, fully support this collaboration between local government units cognizant of our President's priority to ensure that tourism development thrives to strengthen collaboration and engagement," Secretary Frasco said on the sisterhood agreement of the two tourism provinces.

These MOA signings were witnessed by notable figures such as Senators Lapid and Revilla Jr., Office of the Presidential Assistant for the Visayas (OPAV) Undersecretary Terrence Calatrava, DOT Undersecretary Tamano, and other officials from the provincial board and the LGU.

Participating officials in the MOA signings on the TIEZA's assets promotion partnership included Pinamungajan Mayor Ana Jessica Baricuatro, Dumanjug Mayor Efren Guntrano Gica, Santander Mayor Marites Buscato, Bogo City Mayor Carlo Jose Martinez, Argao Mayor Allan Sesaldo, Dalaguete Mayor Ronald Allan Sesante, and Moalboal Mayor Inocentes Cabaron.

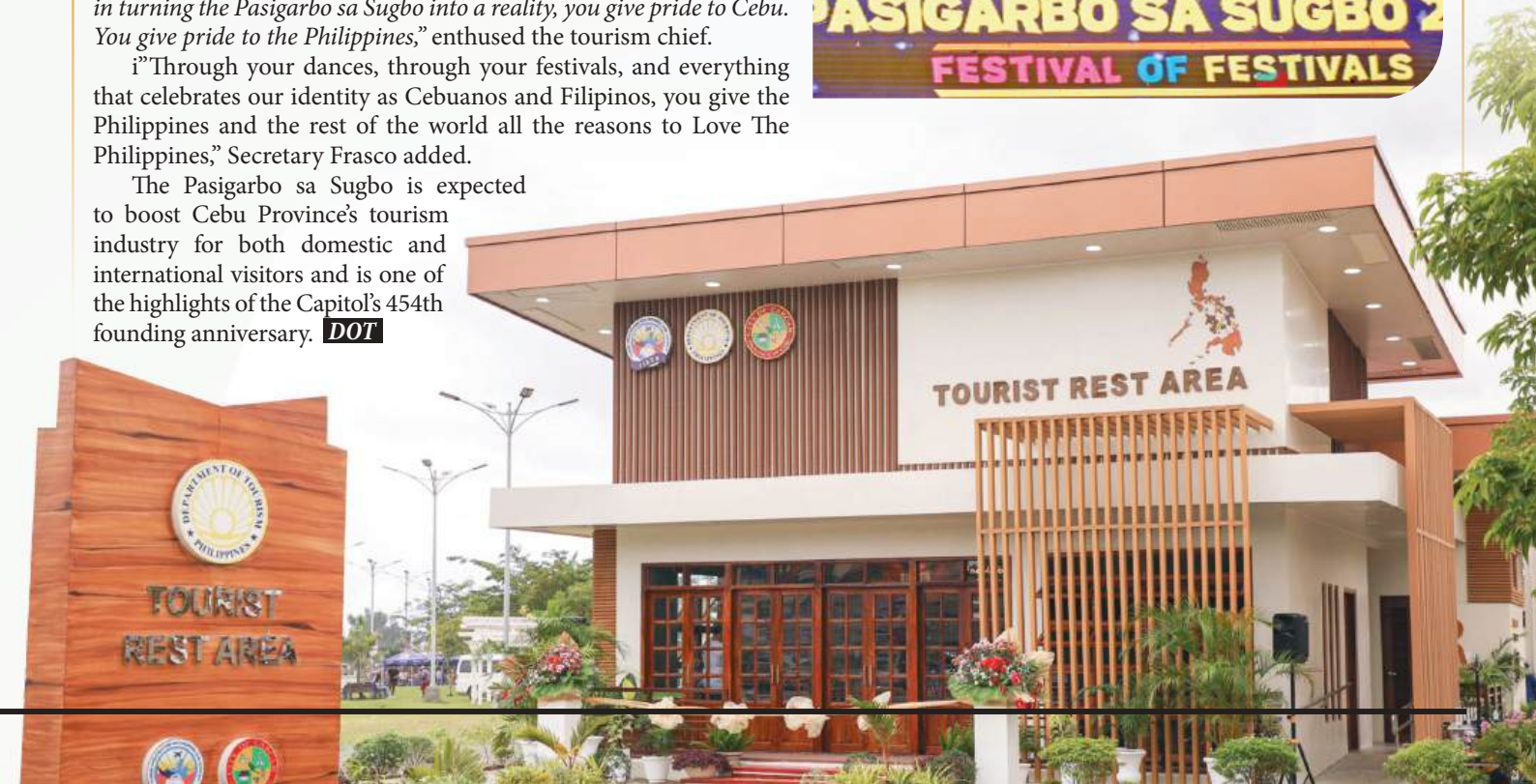
Pasigarbo in Carcar City

The turnover of the TRAs and the MOA signings coincided with the Pasigarbo sa Sugbo 2023, the showcase festival of the Cebu Provincial Government held at the New Carcar City Sports Complex where the Cebuanos' demonstrated their deep affection for the country, as the performances embodied the DOT's "Love The Philippines" campaign.

"The Pasigarbo sa Sugbo, is our opportunity to show the love that we have for Cebu, for the Philippines. Through our festivals that commemorate our culture as Cebuanos, we celebrate our faith in Sto. Niño and our respective patron saints, and herald the identity of every one of our local government units. All of you, our mayors, our officials, our dancers, choreographers, costume makers, and everyone involved in turning the Pasigarbo sa Sugbo into a reality, you give pride to Cebu. You give pride to the Philippines," enthused the tourism chief.

i"Through your dances, through your festivals, and everything that celebrates our identity as Cebuanos and Filipinos, you give the Philippines and the rest of the world all the reasons to Love The Philippines," Secretary Frasco added.

The Pasigarbo sa Sugbo is expected to boost Cebu Province's tourism industry for both domestic and international visitors and is one of the highlights of the Capitol's 454th founding anniversary. ***DOT***



PHL records Php 286B tourism receipts from January to July; Frasco bares efforts to support tourism in Central Visayas

Cebu, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) foresees a strong recovery for Philippine tourism and expressed optimism in meeting—and even surpassing—industry targets for the year.

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco made the assertion as panelist of the latest leg of the Post-SONA Philippine Economic Briefing (PEB) Roadshow of the national government, where she shared updates on the industry's performance under the Marcos administration.

Secretary Frasco noted that from January to July this year, the country's foreign tourism receipts have already tallied Php 286 billion. This figure, she said, is consistent with the over 66 percent tourism international arrivals recovery of the country being higher than the average ASEAN growth of 54 percent, based on the second UNWTO World Tourism Barometer on the Recovery by Region in Q1 2023.

Tourism receipts from foreign and domestic visitors for 2022 amounted to Php 1.87 trillion showing the momentum towards the phenomenal tourism performance in the first half of 2023.

In addition, the Tourism Secretary also shared that as of August 10, the Philippines received 3,376,514 foreign visitor arrivals, which surpasses 70% of the country's 4.8 million baseline industry target for the entire year.

"These numbers are only seen to grow further especially that the Philippines has now fully opened up to tourism. We're very grateful to our President Ferdinand "Bongbong" Marcos, Jr. for prioritizing tourism in his national development agenda," the Tourism Secretary said.

In terms of employment, the DOT recorded over 5.35 million individuals employed in tourism-related industries in 2022, which is 93 percent of the industry's employment figures during the pre-pandemic period of 2019.

Secretary Frasco also cited the statement of the country's economic managers which revealed the rebound of tourism growth as the second driver of economic development in the Philippines for the period January to June 2023.

Harnessing the full tourism potential of Central Visayas

At the Post-SONA PEB held at the Marco Polo Plaza Cebu, Secretary Frasco also provided an overview of the DOT's strategies in order to sustain the tourism industry's momentum under the Marcos administration.

In Central Visayas, where combined international and domestic visitor arrivals have already reached 2.2 million as of June 30, the DOT, according to Secretary Frasco, is further developing the country's tourism portfolio, including the English as Second Language (ESL), which is seen as a big come-on specially for non-english speaking markets. Meanwhile, MICE, golf, as well as health and wellness are also being developed as these are seen as bright spots for tourism in the region, according to the tourism chief.

Another positive development is the exponential increase in connectivity with the additional international flights to and from the Mactan Cebu International Airport (MCIA), now at 195 flights as of August 10, or a growth rate of 315 percent from the same period last year.

Based on the DOT's latest nationwide survey for 2023, Cebu ranks number one in terms of most preferred destination among overnight travelers.

Secretary Frasco also announced the construction of more Tourist Rest Areas (TRAs), in addition to the ones already being constructed in Dauis, Bohol, and in the Municipalities of Carcar, Carmen, and Moalboal. Recently, the TRA in Medellin was inaugurated and turned over to the local government units.

Further, she also signified the DOT's strong intent to develop the region as a cruise tourism hub. This year, 4 cruise ships are expected to make a port of call in various islands in Central Visayas "with much room to grow."

In keeping with its commitment to sustainable tourism development, projects are in the pipeline for the country's key and emerging destinations in Bohol, Siquijor, and Siargao Islands.

The tourism chief likewise maintained confidence in the Philippines industry's ability to bounce back sooner under the leadership of the President and its partnership with stakeholders.

"We anticipate that with the policies supporting tourism under the Marcos administration, the convergences that we have had under our President's whole-of-nation approach towards tourism development, and most importantly, our private sector's partnership, collaboration, continued investment, and belief in the strength of the tourism industry, will allow us to adopt and occupy a more primary position in Asia and recover sooner than what is predicted. Cebu, Central Visayas, and the rest of the Philippines will exceed all expectations because there are just so many reasons to love the Philippines," Secretary Frasco said.

Referring to Central Visayas as a "treasure trove of dive destinations", the Tourism Secretary also pointed out the need to further support diving in the region, and announced the DOT's upcoming Tourism Dive Dialogue.

"Recognizing the huge contribution of diving in Central Visayas, the Marcos administration has seen it fit to hold the very first Tourism Dive Dialogue this September here in Cebu, to consolidate all the efforts of the national government, the local governments, as well as the private sector to be able to ensure that policies and programs will fully support the full expansion of dive tourism here in Central Visayas," Secretary Frasco said.

The DOT through its infrastructure arm, the Tourism Infrastructure Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), also eyes the installation of hyperbaric chambers in key dive sites, including in Dumaguete, and in Daanbantayan in Cebu in 2024.

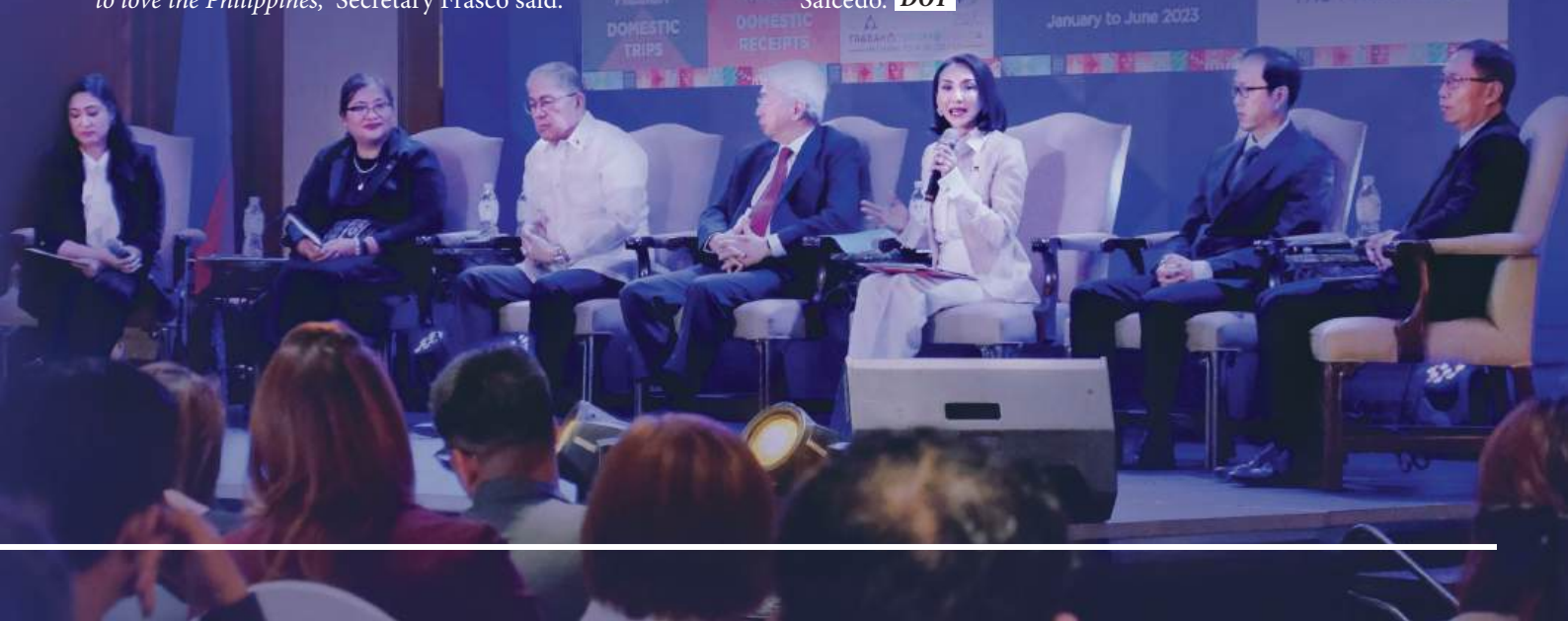
The Philippines as host of 36th joint meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia.

In reintroducing the Philippines to the world, Secretary Frasco also announced Cebu's hosting of the 36th joint meeting of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia next year.

This, after the Philippines, represented by Secretary Frasco, was elected as Vice President of the 25th General Assembly of the UNWTO as well as Chair of the UNWTO Commission for East Asia and the Pacific last June 16.

Also serving as panelists during the Post-SONA PEB Cebu session titled "Reinvigorate. Accelerate. Transform." were Cabinet Secretaries Alfredo Pascual of the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Bienvenido Laguesma of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), as well as Undersecretary Marlo Iringan of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), and Assistant Secretary Genevieve Velicaria-Guevarra of the Department of Agriculture (DA).

Mr. Charles Kenneth Co, President of the Cebu Chamber of Commerce and Industry, also joined and represented the private sector in the panel moderated by Department of Budget and Management (DBM) Undersecretary Margaux Marie Salcedo. ***DOT***



Mindanao, a destination for all

The Department of Tourism (DOT) reaffirms its commitment to promote Mindanao as a viable, safe, and worthwhile destination for all.

DOT Undersecretary for Legal Concerns and Chief of Staff Mae Elaine T. Bathan made the statement, as she represented Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco during the 2023 Post SONA Philippine Economic Briefing (PEB) held at the Dusit D2 Hotel in Davao City.

"Mindanao is a very beautiful region. Whichever adventure, whichever nature-based tourism they would want, whatever of the interest of the changed traveler is in coming in the country, they can find it all in Mindanao. We have a very rich and diverse culture, it tells of so much history and story, and more importantly, its flora, its fauna, and its very rich biodiversity all over the region is something [for] which the Mindanaoans and the Mindanao region could showcase to the world," enthused Undersecretary Bathan.

"The DOT, under the leadership of Secretary Frasco, has continued to collaborate with the different government agencies in order to prepare our tourism industry not only in terms of diversifying our tourism products and portfolio, and empowering our local government units to further promote not only the tourist destinations that have already been established, but to further develop emerging tourist destinations," she added.

During the forum, Undersecretary Bathan likewise noted the rosy prospects of the Philippine tourism industry, following the implementation of government policies approved by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., and the numerous tourism programs executed under the leadership of Secretary Frasco in less than a year after she assumed her post as the country's tourism chief.

"Tourism hasn't been this good in the last three years and we are very optimistic on the prospects of our tourism industry now more than ever. With the issuance of President Marcos Jr. of Proclamation 297, saying that the era of the COVID pandemic has ended, we have shut that door and put it behind us and it's a signal for everyone to move forward for us to recover. And we know for a fact that tourism is one of the economic drivers of our country and such a proclamation would signify that the country is at par with our neighboring countries in terms of the safety and travel protocols, and it also signifies that the Philippines is open and safe for travel and we are more than willing and ready to welcome our visitors to our shores," said Undersecretary Bathan.

Asked about the Department's projections for the tourism industry particularly on its resurgence after the pandemic, the Undersecretary noted that "the DOT is optimistic that we will be able to breach the 2019 pre-pandemic numbers of eight million by 2025.

Undersecretary Bathan was among the key government officials who participated in the PEB in Davao, hosted by the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas, together with Secretary Alfredo Pascual of the Department of Trade and Industry, Secretary Bienvenido Laguesma of the Department of Labor and Employment, Undersecretary Mercedita Sombilla of the Department of Agriculture, Undersecretary Mario Liringan of the Department of the Interior and Local Government, and John Carlo B. Tria, President of the Davao Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The panel addressed an audience composed of representatives from the private sector including business executives, as well as members of diplomatic corps, foreign business chambers, and top officials of various line agencies. ***DOT***

DOT supports "Pagsulong ng Kapayapaan sa Turismo tungo sa Pag-unlad ng Zamboanga Peninsula"

Department of Tourism (DOT) Undersecretary Myra Paz Valderrosa-Abubakar graced the post-State of the Nation Address (SONA) Forum Caravan 2023 titled "Pagsulong ng Kapayapaan sa Turismo tungo sa Pag-unlad ng Zamboanga Peninsula" on July 27 set at the heritage city of Dapitan, Zamboanga del Norte for an impactful discussion on peace, development, and tourism.

Undersecretary Valderrosa-Abubakar delivered a keynote speech on behalf of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia-Frasco, underscoring the Department's commitment to leveraging tourism through the various programs and accomplishments of the DOT for the past year.

"As a Zamboangeña, it makes me so proud to have the Peninsula in the spotlight, showcasing the immense tourism potential our beloved hometown has," the undersecretary said as she beamed with pride for the region's hosting of the post-SONA caravan.

She also highlighted the significant projects achieved in Mindanao such as the tripartite agreement signed by the DOT, the Department of National Defense (DND), and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) last May to spur tourism developments in Mindanao, and the first leg of the Philippine Experience program held in Davao City to showcase the rich culture and heritage of the region.

"Let us continue to show love to our visitors as well as our investors by providing them with enriching opportunities whether through business or leisure activities, so that in the end, we can likewise expect to be paid with love for our country and for our people," she added.

Central to the forum's objectives was the exchange of valuable insights on strategies and initiatives aimed at fostering peace and development, and harnessing the potential of tourism to contribute to economic growth, and its capacity to boost local tourism in the Zamboanga Peninsula region.

Also present in the forum were Philippine Information Agency (PIA) Undersecretary Jose Torres Jr., PIA Assistant Secretary and Deputy Director General Katherine Chloe De Castro, Assistant Secretary and Director General Nicole Jocelle Marie Managbanag, Mr. Ivan Ang representing Zamboanga del Norte Governor Rosalina Jalosjos, Dapitan City Mayor Seth Frederick Jalosjos, PIA Director Noemi Edaga, Regional Director Dara Mae Cataluña, and other representatives from the provincial and municipal government units and tourism stakeholders from the private sector, who all actively contributed to the dynamic discussions. ***DOT***

Lawmakers laud tourism initiatives, bat for higher 2024 budget for DOT

Quezon City – The Department of Tourism (DOT) on August 15 expressed its gratitude to the House of Representatives (HoR) Appropriations Committee, after members manifested support to its plans and programs, and the proposed reconsideration and increase in the budget of the Department and its attached agencies for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024.

This, following the presentation of Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco at the Budget Hearing carried out by the HoR Committee on Appropriations, where the DOT's performance and accomplishments in the past year were laid out, as well as its budget and necessary resources enclosed in the National Expenditure Program (NEP) for next year.

According to Secretary Frasco, as the Department embarks on the objectives and strategies towards the transformation of the Philippines into a tourism powerhouse in Asia as envisioned by President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr., and for the country to finally be shoulder to shoulder with its ASEAN neighbors as far as tourism growth is concerned, adequate funding support is needed for attainment of such goals.

"I would like to preface my answer by stating the goal for the Department of Tourism for 2024, which is at 7.7 million international tourists at its baseline and, therefore, we are going to aggressively pursue that number, if not in excess of that number, in our earnest desire to return to pre-pandemic levels sooner than what is predicted," Secretary Frasco said.

"Arming the Department of Tourism with the additional budget would help us greatly in the flagship programs that have been identified by the Marcos administration that seeks not only to benefit our key destinations, but our emerging destinations as well," the DOT chief enthused.

Tourism, a crucial driver of Philippine economy: DOT

Making the DOT's case before the House Committee of Appropriations, Secretary Frasco reported on the promising recovery rate of the Philippine tourism industry under the Marcos administration.

Among the most notable milestones presented by Secretary Frasco is the country's international tourist arrivals from January to July 2023 which was recorded at 3.427 million. This registers a 66.33 percent recovery rate compared to the same period in 2019, and surpasses the 2022 average growth rate of 54 percent in Asia Pacific, according to the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) World Tourism Barometer May 2023. The number comprises 71 percent of the DOT's baseline target for 2023, which is 4.8 million foreign visitor arrivals.

Meanwhile, the DOT also recorded PhP 368 billion in revenue from international visitors from January 1 to July 30, 2023.

While the DOT was able to successfully launch its flagship programs through budget augmentation from its attached agencies including the Tourism Promotions Board (TPB) and Tourism Infrastructure and Enterprise Zone Authority (TIEZA), Secretary Frasco noted that with "The Department of Tourism being the agency chiefly mandated for the development and promotion of the entirety of the tourism industry, it is in dire need of a budget that is equitable to its contribution to the coffers of the national economy."

Lawmakers throw support behind higher budget for DOT, Love the Philippines

Delivering her opening remarks at the briefing on behalf of Committee on Appropriations Chairperson Elizaldy Co, Marikina City 2nd District Stella Luz Quimbo–who sits as the Committee Vice Chairperson–stressed on the importance of the country's tourism industry, noting that it is "is undoubtedly one of the most dynamic and vibrant sectors of the modern world that has the power to stimulate and propel economic growth, cultural exchange and social development within a nation."

During the interpellation, several lawmakers have pointed out the need for a higher tourism budget in order to support the DOT in its efforts to develop tourism and sustain industry milestones gained so far under the Marcos administration.

Representative Rufus Rodriguez from the 2nd district of Cagayan de Oro City underscored tourism as an *"indispensable element of the national economy and an industry of national interest and importance"*, moving to provide a bigger budget for the Department to finance roads leading to tourism destinations across the country. "That is why I am here today, to support the DOT budget, and to support Secretary Frasco. *"We are very proud of you, you are a very competent, diligent, and hardworking Secretary,"* Rep. Rufus added.

Bohol 1st district Representative Edgar Chatto, who co-authored the said law, prefaced his interpellation by commending Secretary Frasco.

"Congratulations Secretary Frasco, you have been really leading the DOT in a way that has also brought all the laurels in the country in terms of our recovery efforts, and we are so happy with that. It cascades down to the local government levels, where our tourism industry is also picking up. We are feeling that in the Province of Bohol, through the increase in international arrivals, with international flights as well, and so on. Thank you once again," Rep. Chatto said.

Isabela 6th district Representative Faustino "Inno" Dy, a staunch supporter of the DOT who defended the Department's budget for FY 2023 last year, also expressed admiration for Secretary Frasco's leadership.

"Since last year, your direction is to bring out the beauty of our destinations. I also commend your decision to reinvigorate the tourism industry, through a new slogan; Love The Philippines, it is simple and a powerful phrase and it encapsulates the beauty of our country," Rep. Dy enthused.

Albay 1st district Representative Edcel Lagman also manifested his support to the DOT by alluding to the enhanced tourism campaign, Love the Philippines.

"With the innumerable and pristine tourist destinations and attractions of the Philippines, I'm certain that the Filipino and foreign tourists will Love the Philippines. We cannot go wrong with love," Rep. Lagman said, adding that *"with the hope that at the proper time, with the approval of the Majority, we can increase the budget of the DOT, the Department of Tourism, if not to equal this current level, to exceed it, in the commission of its performance."*

Meanwhile, Zamboanga Sibugay 1st district Representative Wilter Palma also commended Secretary Frasco's leadership, while offering suggestions to emulate successful tourism projects, such as the Suroy Suroy Sugbo program of Cebu Province, as well as address in growing the country's domestic tourism.

"Keep up the good work Madam Secretary, and I hope you can copy the good practices of the good Governor of Cebu, the Suroy Suroy Sugbo, and replicate it here in the entire tourism sector," Rep. Palma said.

According to Secretary Frasco, shared that the Department had already benchmarked Suroy Suroy in launching the flagship Philippine Experience Program which will be launched across the country's regions. The first launch was done successfully in the Davao Regions in late June, with the DOT having invited members of embassies with existing travel advisories against the Philippines to, according to Secretary Frasco, *"allow these countries' representatives to see for their own eyes the real peace and security situation of Mindanao that is ready and its viable for international tourism."*

Other lawmakers including Deputy Minority Leader Rep. Bernadette Herrera shared the same sentiments with Rep. Lagman over the decrease in the DOT's budget for FY 2024.

"I'm concerned with the decrease of the budget of the Department of Tourism, especially since as mentioned, 3.4 million visitors while of course it's higher than last year, but still far away from our 2019 and pre-pandemic levels of 8.6 million tourists. So, from 3.85 billion US dollars, 9 billion US dollars pa ang hahabulin natin if we want to go to the pre-pandemic levels. So, decreasing it is really unwarranted," Rep. Herrera said.

Underscoring the necessity of developing roads leading to tourist destinations, Rep. Jose "Bong" Teves, Jr. also manifested his support to the DOT and Secretary Frasco, saying "Kung kakailangin nyo pa ang dagdag na budget, susuporta po kami."

Commending Secretary Frasco and officials present at the budget hearing including TPB COO Marga Nograles, Rep. Quimbo acknowledged the "huge sacrifice" that comes with the responsibilities at the Department.

"I commend you for a job well done and when I look at Secretary Christina (Garcia Frasco), of course, my very good friend, (TPB) COO Marga (Nograles), you're mothers of very young children. So, in addition to the very hard work, I'm sure this comes with huge personal sacrifices. So, congratulations, and thank you very much for all the things that you do for the country," enthused Rep. Quimbo.

Full budget utilization by year end

As she expressed the DOT's gratitude for the lawmakers' outpouring of support and backing for a higher tourism budget for FY 2024, Secretary Frasco also took note of their suggestions and concerns, including on the utilization rate of the Department for the current year.

The DOT chief likewise assured that stringent measures have been put in place toward the full utilization of its 2023 budget by the end of the year, as part of the Department's commitment to uphold transparency in its undertakings. Recently, it received from the Commission on Audit (CoA) an Unmodified Opinion on the fairness of the presentation of the Financial Statements as of December 31, 2022. ***DOT***

DOT, NCIP ink partnership to empower indigenous peoples, protect and promote cultural heritage through tourism

The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) forged a formal agreement in a bid to create a strategic partnership between the two government bodies to support and implement the Katutubo-KAPWA project.

The Katutubo-KAPWA project is a nationwide initiative which will enjoin support for the indigenous cultural communities/indigenous peoples (ICCs/IPs) in tourism development, covering destinations and IP communities in Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao.

The ceremonial signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was led by DOT Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and NCIP Chair Allen A. Capuyan, witnessed by Undersecretary and Chief of Staff Atty. Mae Elaine Bathan and NCIP Acting Bureau Director Glenda Pua at the DOT Central Office in Makati City.

"We subscribe to the belief that in honoring the origins of the Philippines and the Filipino people, we strengthen the Filipino brand, we enrich the Filipino identity, and we give our fellow Filipinos a necessary and timely reminder that there is indeed so much to love about the Philippines, and that starts with ourselves, the Filipino people, including our indigenous peoples. Which is why the Department of Tourism has sought this partnership with the NCIP because we sincerely wish to manifest our firm commitment to honoring our indigenous peoples and giving them opportunities for economic advancement through tourism," Secretary Frasco said.

"This is a happy and historic day for both the Department of Tourism and NCIP as we have formalized our commitment to support the good work that the NCIP has done to ensure the preservation and promotion of the indigenous peoples of the Philippines," she added.

With the DOT's Office of Special Concerns (OSC) under the Office of the Secretary (OSEC) as lead, the Katutubo-KAPWA project also targets to address the gaps and needs of each destination such as the lack of tourism skills and competencies among IPs involved in tourism activities, and essential infrastructure, among others.

This is in line with the current administration's thrust to diversify and equalize tourism product development, introduce multidimensional tourism, strengthen tourism governance through close collaboration with stakeholders, and improve the overall tourist experience.

A Technical Working Group (TWG) will also be created composed of representatives from DOT and NCIP to monitor and oversee its implementation.

The tourism chief likewise emphasized that the partnership is part of the current administration's thrust toward reintroducing the Philippines to the world, with the ICCs/IPs as the starting point.

"Our indigenous communities are the vanguards of the Filipino identity. In their heritage, their history, and their living cultural traditions, we are reminded of that which we all know to be true– we all love our country. There is so much to love about the country, foremost of which is our identity as a Filipino people," she said.

Meanwhile, NCIP Chair Capuyan said that they are grateful to the DOT for the said partnership.

"It is our honor and privilege to be partnering with the Department of Tourism in the implementation of our Katutubo-KAPWA project, which aims to involve the indigenous cultural communities and indigenous peoples in tourism development," he said.

"We hope that this will pave the way for a more stable and secure future," he added.

Among the important commitments of the DOT from the partnership include the provision of financial support to tourism-related capacity building/capacity development, infrastructure projects, product development, and other tourism-related programs activities, and projects to eligible and interested ICCs/IPs that will help improve their socio-economic status as well as for the development and promotion of their ancestral domains; assistance and funding for the identified tourism-related projects of the ICCs/IPs for enterprise, livelihood, and jobs creation with the support of the DOT's attached agencies to help reduce the country's unemployment and alleviate poverty while boosting the tourism industry.

The DOT has also committed to providing assistance and promotional platforms for the products of the ICCs/IPs to attract tourists to patronize the local tourism economy.

Secretary Frasco emphasized the importance of striking a balance between heritage and promotion as a value proposition for tourism, thus, citing as well that the DOT is excited about embarking on the partnership by investing first in soft infrastructure for IPs who are also tourism frontliners.

Likewise, the NCIP identifies the DOT as a strong partner for the protection and promotion of arts and culture components of the country as a driver toward nation-building. ***DOT***

DOT, PwC Philippines renews agreement to promote PH tourism

Makati City - The Department of Tourism (DOT) and Isla Lipana & Co., also known as PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Philippines, inked an agreement to continue the advancement and promotion of Philippine tourism and boost investments through joint leadership and tourism-related programs and activities.

Representing the DOT in the renewal of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signing event that took place at One Pacific Place Makati, DOT Office of Tourism Standards and Regulation (OTSR) Director Virgilio Maguigad recalled the beginning of the Department's collaborative journey with the PwC Philippines which started after the first MOU was signed in 2018.

"Your commitment, expertise, and unwavering support have been instrumental in our journey's success. Together, we have not only transformed the tourism landscape but have also inspired a nation. As we forge ahead, I am confident that our partnership will continue to shine as a beacon of hope, innovation, and shared prosperity," he said.

According to Director Maguigad, since the initial MOU signing, the PwC, as the DOT's Knowledge Partner, supported the DOT in conducting capacity-building seminars.

These seminars equipped local government units (LGUs) and private property owners with skills in smart pitching and creating investment proposals and presentations, which enabled them to confidently present projects to potential investors and help facilitate tourism growth in their areas such as the building of infrastructures.

Furthermore, they effectively organized the "Invest Tourism Philippines: The Next Big Thing in Southeast Asia" conference which facilitated the exchange of knowledge and insights among industry leaders to enhance tourism.

They also launched the Tourism Investment Business Exchange (TIBEX) in 2019, a platform that connected local government units (LGUs), the private sector, and potential investors to stimulate economic activity and address accommodation gaps.

With these achievements, the renewal of the MOU between the DOT and PwC this year entails the co-development of a Tourism Investment Appetite Survey and Guidebook, which are strategic tools that offer potential investors vital insights and resources about the country to help attract significant investments.

This, aligned with the Department's pursuit to improve infrastructure and accessibility, equalization of tourism product

development and promotion, strengthen tourism governance through collaboration with local government units and stakeholders, and enhancement of overall tourism experience in the country.

Also within the scope of the DOT and PwC Philippines are the following undertakings: sharing of knowledge and expertise in the promotion of Philippine tourism investments; providing independent advice and related technical assistance to each other in relation to the specific projects that they agree to undertake; facilitating the administration of periodic investment appetite surveys focusing on tourism development; conducting consultations and organizing seminars and other events on issues of common interest; extending to one another invitations to conferences, symposia, fora, and other events related to their cooperation in agreed priority areas; and strengthening of tourism investment database by exchanging relevant information and documents.

Isla Lipana and Co. Chairman and Senior Partner Roderick Danao strongly expressed his gratitude and optimism on the PwC's renewed agreement with the DOT saying that, *"It is incumbent among us as Filipinos to promote our country as a premier tourism destination and we could do that together."*

"It is our commitment, to support DOT on every initiative that you will have to the best that we could, and we would make use of our expertise and resources to achieve our common goal of promoting a vibrant tourism industry in the Philippines," he added.

Isla Lipana & Co is the Philippine member firm of the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) network group committed to delivering audit, tax, and advisory services. ***DOT***

DOT, TESDA ink deal to expand tourism education, reinforce tourism training opportunities

Manila, Philippines - The Department of Tourism (DOT) and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) sealed a five-year formal partnership to expand opportunities for training and upskilling of tourism workers to meet the demands of the tourism industry post-pandemic.

The ceremonial signing of the Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) was led by Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco and TESDA Director General Suharto Mangudadatu, with DOT Undersecretaries Mae Elaine Bathan, Ferdinand Jumapao; and TESDA Deputy Director Generals Vidal Villanueva III, Rosanna Urdaneta, and Aniceto Bertiz III as witnesses.

Under the MOA, the cooperating government bodies aim to empower local communities by providing tourism scholarships, enhancing the employable skills of industry stakeholders through training in specific tourism skills; updating and developing Tourism-related Training Regulations (TRs), Competency Standards (CS), competency-based curricula (CBC) and Competency Assessment Tools (CATs) in accordance to new trends, and emerging skills and technologies; collaborate in the implementation of Enterprise-based Trainings (EBT) or Supervised Industry Learning (SIL); and collaborate in the implementation and promotion of the different human capital development programs and services of the parties, including the development and capacitation of the pool of trainers and assessors.

Consequently, a joint technical working group composed of three representatives each from DOT and TESDA will be created to oversee the tasks under the partnership.

"I would like to extend my profound gratitude to TESDA led by the very active and dynamic Secretary Mangudadatu for this partnership with the Department of Tourism that will further the goals of our President's vision for the transformation of the tourism industry, whose foundation and best asset are no other than the Filipino people," the tourism chief said in her keynote address.

"This Memorandum of Agreement between TESDA and the DOT will further the development of our human capital in the Philippines, as well as empower individuals to contribute effectively to the recovery, resilience, innovation, and sustainability of the industry in the post-pandemic era," she added, thanking the agency as well for including tourism as a priority in their National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan.

According to the tourism chief, the initiatives under the partnership will also help support the thrust of the Marcos administration in making tourism *"a pivotal and reliable economic pillar for the Philippines fostering prosperity and enriching the lives of millions of Filipinos."*

"But we will not stop at training alone; after training the workers under this partnership, we will ensure that they are employable by capitalizing as well on our existing partnership with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE)," she emphasized.

It can be recalled that among Frasco's first initiatives as tourism chief was the collaboration with the DOLE to mount the Trabaho, Turismo, Asenso: The 1st Philippine Tourism Job Fairs which had offered more than 21,000 employment opportunities to tourism workers.

For his part, Director General Mangudadatu thanked the DOT for partnering with TESDA.

"I would like to thank Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco for being with us at this momentous event. The signing of this Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Tourism will set another milestone in the development and enhancement of our tourism education," he said.

"Through this partnership, we will be producing a world-class tourism workforce and competitive human resources in the tourism sector. I am dedicating this partnership to the trainees and college graduates of the tourism program, out-of-school youth, and displaced tourism who are the beneficiaries of the partnership," he added.

Other partnerships between the DOT and the TESDA also include the implementation of the ASEAN mutual recognition arrangement for tourism professionals and the review and updating of training regulations for industry workers.

The MOA signing event was part of the series of activities for the TESDA 29th Anniversary and National Tech-Voc Day held at the SM Megamall in Mandaluyong City.

Other government officials present during the event are National Commission on Muslim Filipinos (NCMF) Secretary Guiling Mamondiong, Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) Rear Admiral Eustacio Nimrod Enriquez, National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) Chairperson Allen Capuyan, Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Chief Jail Director Ruel Rivera, and Government Academe Industry Network (GAIN) Chairman Peter Laurel. ***DOT***

DOT in full support of FIBA World Cup

Bulacan - Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco said the country's hosting of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 is a big boost to the tourism industry, and will further position the Philippines as a sports tourism destination.

The Philippines hosted this year's edition of the highly-anticipated FIBA basketball tournament, along with Japan and Indonesia.

"With our shared love and passion for basketball, we celebrate this historic hosting as an opportunity to showcase to the world the beauty of the Philippines, and treat our guests to the world-renowned Filipino hospitality," Secretary Frasco said.

"From our sites, our sounds, our flavors, our festivals, our stories, and our smiles, we join a proud nation grateful and blessed to show the world the many reasons to Love the Philippines," she added.

A record of more than 38,000 spectators attended the opening day of the FIBA Basketball World Cup at the Philippine Arena in Bulacan held August 25 evening, while 600,000 people are expected to watch the games in identified venues including Smart Araneta Coliseum in Quezon City, and Mall of Asia Arena in Pasay City, from August 25 until September 10.

The DOT was in full support of the FIBA World Cup 2023 opening with Secretary Frasco joining President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr, lawmakers, cabinet officials, and the country's sports industry bosses during the opening ceremony at the Philippine Arena.

"The Department of Tourism joins the entire nation in extending a warm Filipino welcome to all participants and spectators of the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023 in the Philippines," said Secretary Frasco.

OPM artists Sarah Geronimo, Jet Pangan, and Ben&Ben led the roster of performers on the opening day.

Among the initiatives done by the Department to support the country's hosting of the FIBA World Cup 2023 included assisting in airport reception that highlights the Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE), training of FIBA volunteers, enhancement of select sites, and the development and offering of FIBA tour packages that visitors can avail to explore the country's tourism gems in between the action-packed games. ***DOT***

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PBBM's prioritization makes tourism among top drivers of economic growth -- DOT Chief

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco says the ascendance of tourism as among the top drivers of economic development, ranking second for the first 6 months of 2023 is a result of the Marcos Administration's prioritization of the industry, noting its vital contribution to the country's progress.

Government economic data reveals that from January to June 2023, the rebound of tourism in growth areas emerged as the second driver of economic development in the country.

The number one driver of growth is the registered high employment rate since the start of the year, followed by the resurgence of tourism, increase in investment registration activities, and students coming back to school.

Speaking before some 300 members of the PHILTOA's 4th General Membership Meeting held at the Crimson Hotel in Alabang, Muntinlupa, Secretary Frasco reiterated the pro-tourism policies implemented by President Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. provided the impetus needed to reinvigorate the industry badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"Philippine tourism is back and it's back with a vengeance. The robust growth and recovery of Philippine tourism is consistent with what we have seen since the start of the Marcos administration," said Secretary Frasco in her extemporaneous keynote address.

"The effort of our President Ferdinand Bongbong Marcos, Jr. at the very beginning, was to send the unequivocal message that tourism is a priority. And therefore, he mobilized the entire national government to come together to assist the Department of Tourism to open up the Philippines once again to travel," the tourism chief added.

Frasco cited the efforts of the government to ease pandemic restrictions such as the lifting of the mandatory mask mandate, the use of the One Health Pass, the approval of e-visa for select tourism source markets, the reintroduction of the Philippines' cultural and natural assets, the directive to provide tax refund to foreign visitors which is now in the process of legislation, and recently, the Presidential Proclamation 297 that lifted the state of public health emergency throughout the Philippines, among others, which according to Frasco, greatly helped in mobilizing our tourists to come into and go around the country.

As of August 10, the DOT has recorded 3.360 million foreign visitor arrivals raking in some Php 285 billion in tourism revenues.

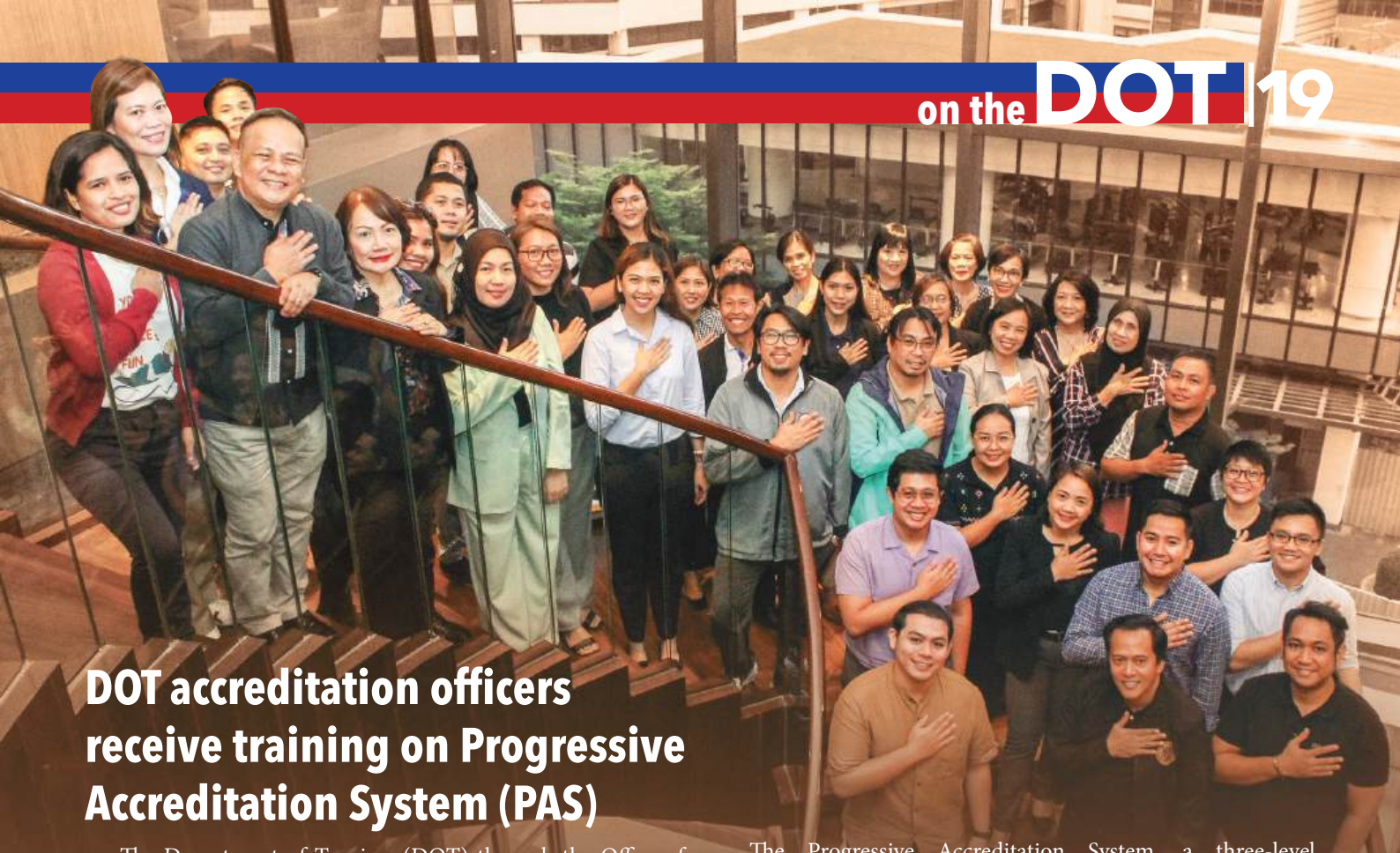
"Because our President prioritized tourism and travel, this has also led to various convergences between the Department of Tourism and our fellow government agencies. The focus of the department has not been on the singular aspect of promotions alone, but rather to ask the difficult questions and to come up with solutions to the essential pillars of tourism to give our country a fighting chance of being competitive in the ASEAN region," Frasco added

Meanwhile, Philippine Statistics Authority data shows an increase of 612 thousand in the Accommodation and Food Services sector looking at the difference between the 1.66 million employed in the sector in June 2022 with that of the 2.27 million as of June 2023.

According to Frasco, the steady increase in the number of tourism labor force supports a strong semblance of stability and progress in the industry as economic resurgence resonates with the manpower that builds up the tourism sector.

She likewise expressed her appreciation for the tourism sector's achievement, stating, *"The tourism industry's ascent as among the top drivers of economic development, and the emergence of the accommodation sector, a major component of the tourism industry among the Top five major industries with the largest increase in employment is a testament to the collaborative efforts of our government, local communities, and stakeholders. Our commitment to expanding the horizons of Philippine tourism to highlight our best assets including our culture, heritage, and identity, improvement of infrastructure, digitalization and connectivity, spreading equal opportunities for tourism development to the countryside, introduction of tourism innovations, focus on sustainable tourism practices, combined with the sheer beauty and diversity of our nation, has resonated with both the international and domestic travelers."*

"With the remarkable progress achieved by the tourism sector in the first half of 2023, the Department of Tourism remains steadfast in its pursuit of continued tourism development and excellent performance in both the domestic and international arrival sectors. As the second half of the year unfolds, the department is focused on further enhancing tourism offerings, fostering partnerships, expanding tourism opportunities, and continuing to showcase all the reasons to love the Philippines as a premier destination for travelers seeking authentic and meaningful experiences," Secretary Frasco said. ***DOT***



DOT accreditation officers receive training on Progressive Accreditation System (PAS)

The Department of Tourism (DOT) through the Office of Tourism Standards and Regulation- Standards Development Division (OTSR-SDD) conducted a Tourism Quality Advisors' Orientation at the Holiday Inn and Suites Makati, which aims to familiarize DOT accreditation officers with the updated guidelines of the Progressive Accreditation System to ensure a seamless implementation of the amended accreditation standards across the country.

"When the pandemic arrived, our lives changed, so we also needed to update our accreditation rules. That's why the OTSR sat down again to revisit our current rules, the Progressive Accreditation System...Our foreign tourists have expectations for the services and facilities they use in the country. So, to provide that worthwhile and unforgettable experience, we have to ensure quality services and facilities," stated Assistant Secretary for Tourism Regulation, Coordination, and Resource Generation (TRCRG) Maria Rica Bueno in her welcome remarks.

The Updated Guidelines of the Progressive Accreditation System (DOT Memorandum Circular No. 2023-0003), signed on May 31, 2023, contain up-to-date policies and standards to be rolled out to tourism stakeholders.

The Progressive Accreditation System, a three-level recognition scheme by the DOT for primary tourism enterprises, encompasses progressive minimum standards and exceeds customers' expectations.

The three levels are categorized as Basic, Regular, and Premium Accreditation, depending on the standard compliance of the tourism enterprises upon inspection.

To recall, in 2018, the DOT issued the initial Progressive Accreditation System guidelines, mandating a more inclusive accreditation scheme and developing a database of primary tourism enterprises in the country.

During the orientation, officers from the Standards Development Division (SDD), namely Marissa Victoria Claustro, Precy-Salvacion Aguinaldo, and Blessy Grace Tansingco, led discussions on the revised accreditation standards for key tourism enterprises: Mabuhay Accommodations and Homestay, Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) Organizers and Venues, Travel and Tours Services, and Tourist Transport Operators.

The orientation highlighted significant aspects of the updated Progressive Accreditation System. These include replacing Basic Registration with Basic Accreditation, incorporating Tourist Water Transports into the system, aligning transport categories with MARINA, introducing three MICE Venue categories, removing the room requirement for Mabuhay Accommodations, adding Filipinization and digitalization/technology indicators, addressing environmental permit processes, and considering ancillary MICE venue accreditation.

A total of 35 Accreditation Officers from the DOT Regional Offices and the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), and officers from the DOT's Standards Monitoring and Enforcement Division (SMED) actively participated in the orientation and underwent inspection exercises before implementing the Updated Progressive Accreditation System Guidelines in their respective regions.

The DOT also provided the orientation to primary tourism enterprises, tourism associations, and local tourism officers. ***DOT***

Secretary Frasco leads oath taking of newly minted executive board members of the DOT Employees Association

Tourism Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco led the oath taking of the newly minted executive board members of the Department of Tourism Employees Association (DOTEA).

The following have been elected as officers' of the Association:

President, Carolyn P. Gabriel; Vice President, Ricardo R. Rosel; Secretary, Lia T. Insigne; Treasurer, Elizabeth R. Andal; Internal Auditor, Charisma L. Evangelista; AF Representative, Jeffrey Jerome M. Pugao; OSEC Representative, Cesar N. Navidad; TRCRG Representative, Irwin M. Baraan; TD & MDG Representative, Ryan R. Carlos; and Luzon Sector Representative, Thomas G. Santos.

As members of the DOTEA executive board, the officers shall represent the interests and concerns of the DOT employees and be advocates of employee rights, benefits, and to push for working conditions conducive to productivity and efficiency among members of the DOT organization. ***DOT***

Love the Philippines free rides for DOT employees

Department of Tourism (DOT) Secretary Christina Garcia Frasco stood alongside the recently inducted officers of the DOT Employees Association (DOTEA), as well as the dedicated officials and employees of the agency, around the newly-wrapped DOT shuttle service adorned with the country's "Love The Philippines" tourism slogan.

Through the personally funded initiative of Secretary Frasco, the "Love the Philippines Bus" will now shuttle DOT employees residing in the Southern Luzon area, offering a convenient and free ride to and from Cavite. The initiative aims to alleviate the commuting woes of employees, reflecting, according to Secretary Frasco, *"our sincere commitment to their well-being"*.

The members of the DOTEA also met with Secretary Frasco and other DOT officials, where they expressed their heartfelt gratitude for the Secretary's trailblazing projects and programs, particularly the initiatives prioritizing the welfare of the Department's workforce.

Last March, the DOT also inaugurated the Day Care and Child-Minding Center to provide a safe space where DOT employees can entrust their children while they are at work, free of charge. ***DOT***

ON THE GROUND NEWS

Regional News Updates

DOT boost Mindanao cruise tourism

Mindanao's cruise tourism portfolio is getting a much-needed development, as new shore excursion packages are currently being designed for Zamboanga City and Tawi-Tawi, while existing cruise tours are also being updated as a result of the Department of Tourism's (DOT) Cruise Stakeholders Familiarization Tour and Site Assessment last August 1–5, 2023.

Among the said cruise tours for the island group, which encompass a diverse range of experiences, are culture and heritage tours, interfaith tours, island tours, and expedition ship journeys.

The five-day inspection, organized by the DOT Office of Product and Market Development (OPMD) Cruise Team, brought together stakeholders such as port agents, shore excursion handlers, tour operators, local government units of Zamboanga City and Tawi-Tawi, the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), and other cruise tourism partners.

Coordinated in partnership with the Office of DOT Undersecretary Myra Paz Valderrosa Abubakar, and Department of Tourism (DOT) Region IX led by Director Dara May Cataluña, the site evaluation not only delved into the cultural and scenic treasures of Mindanao but also evaluated its potential as a future hub for domestic and international cruise travel.

Meanwhile, this year, the country is scheduled to welcome five cruise calls in Mindanao, specifically in Bucas Grande, Daku Island, and Sohoton in Surigao del Norte, as well as in North Sibayan in Davao. Additionally, Zamboanga has already been identified as a cruise stop for 2024. ***DOT***

Bisita, Be My Guest program bannered in Kalayaan Festival Madrid

By: Philippine Department of Tourism - London Office

The Department of Tourism (DOT) through its London Office extended a warm invitation to overseas Filipinos and their Spanish and foreign friends, employers, colleagues, and extended relatives to join the Bisita, Be My Guest (BBMG) Program during the two-day Kalayaan Festival Madrid held recently in Spain.

The BBMG is the DOT's guest incentive program that encourages Filipinos to invite foreigners to visit the Philippines, in exchange for a raffle ticket and a chance to win generous prizes.

Among the exciting prizes at stake are condominium units from Megaworld Corporation and SMDC, house and lot from Amaia Land, shopping perks from Rustan's and SM Supermalls, and holiday getaways from Philippine Airlines, and Cebu Pacific. Partner hotels and resorts, including the luxurious Nay Palad Hideaway in Siargao, will be providing all expense paid accommodations to top tourist destinations in our country.

Ambassador Philippe Lhuillier of the Philippine Embassy in Madrid led the Philippine National Day festivities, which witnessed an incredible turnout of over 12,000 attendees.

Kalayaan Festival Madrid was held with the support of event partners from the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), Empowered Filipinos of Spain, Megaworld International, and the ABS/TFC Team.

In addition to promoting the BBMG campaign, the PDOT-London Office also featured its consumer activation bus in collaboration with Viajes El Corte Ingles, Spain's largest travel and department store conglomerate, to bring Philippine tour programs closer to the Spanish market. ***DOT***

TOURISM RELATED EVENTS

Meeting with Private Sector Advisory Council - Tourism Sector

Filipino Brand of Service Excellence (FBSE) training for volunteers in the FIBA Basketball World Cup 2023

Courtesy meeting with F.M. Borhan Uddin, Bangladesh Ambassador to the Philippines

Courtesy meeting with Megawati Dato Paduka Haji Manan, Brunei Ambassador Darussalam to the Philippines

Courtesy meeting with Johann Brieger, Austrian Ambassador to the Philippines

Courtesy visit from Philippine Postal Corporation

Government of San Juan launched the San Juan City Art Trail

Rotary Club of Manila Membership Meeting

TO OUR SEPTEMBER BIRTHDAY CELEBRATORS

1 Jaime Catingay

1 Olivert James Mendoza

2 Cecil Aranton

2 Darlene Joy Guerra

4 Juan Olin III

5 Sonia Beleno

5 Marilou Pangilinan

5 Samuel Rey Carranza

5 Remzel Mae Delmo

6 Marvin Malacaman

8 Robert Cabalu

8 Monaliza Lauron

8 Mary Grace Joven

9 Precious Jane Rebollos-Alumbro

10 Marvin Nicolas Uyengco

10 Candida Jimenez

11 Katherine Alcantara

11 Alexandria Bethina Cruz

11 Collins Karla Telmo

12 Maria Theresa Pajarito

12 Camille Simpao

13 Armin Hautea

13 Allan Sto. Tomas

14 Hazel Javier

14 Raquel Cheng

15 Mariville Ramos

15 Erwin Umandal

15 Richelyn Delos Santos

16 Olivia Nicole Maniti

18 Sofia Pagsuyuin

18 Zoren Lou Dagaas

21 Maria Salee Mora

21 Jean Piaget Manabat

22 Winifredo Godinez Jr.

22 Buena Carla Zaldivia,

24 Vanezza Marie Serrano

24 Celstine Joyce Sy

25 Fanibeth Domingo

27 Jerilee Grantoza

28 Azucena Pallugna

29 Jerome Diaz

29 Therese Abao

30 Larry Moran